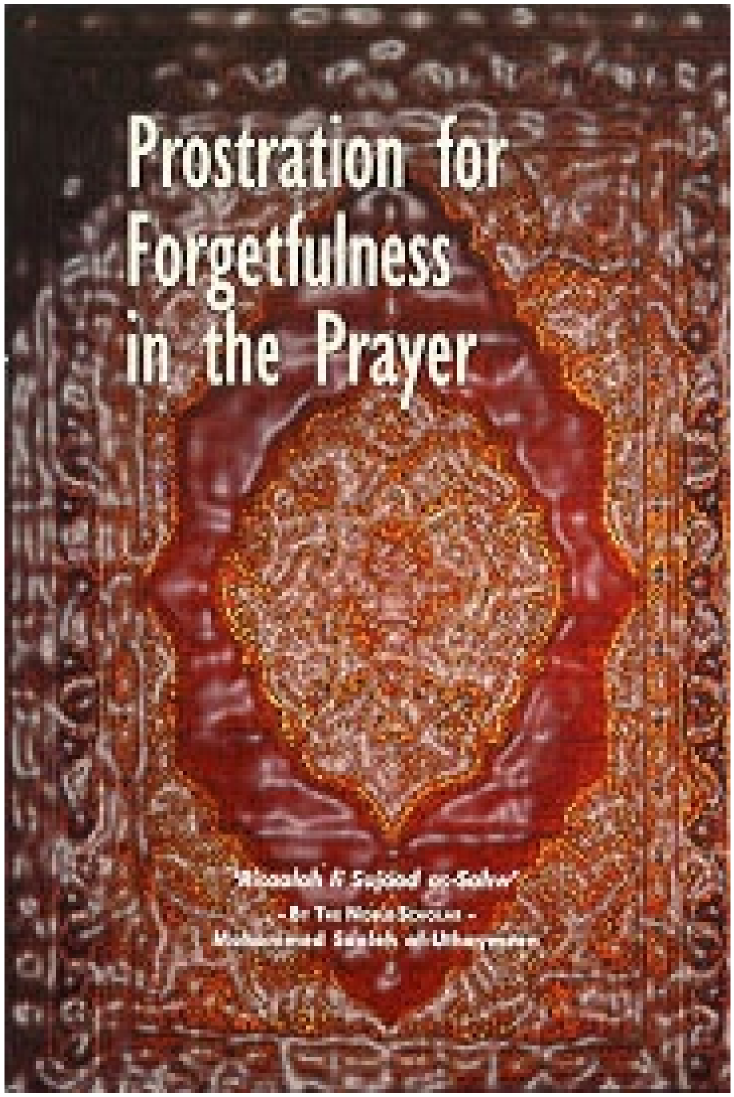

Prostration for Forgetfulness in the Prayer
'Risaalah fi Sujood as-Sahw'
- By The Noble Scholar -
Muhammad Saalih al-Uthaymeen

A TREATISE ABOUT

The Prostration of Forgetfulness

By

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Bismillah ar-Rahmaan ar-Raheem

All Praise is for Allaah, the Lord of all creation, and may He extol and send blessings of peace upon our Prophet Muhammad who delivered the clear message, and upon his true followers, his Companions, and those who follow them upon good until the Day of Requital. To proceed:

Then many people are ignorant about many of the rulings concerning the Sujoodus-Sahw (prostration for forgetfulness) in the prayer. Some of them leave the Sujoodus-Sahw when it is obligatory upon them; others perform the prostration in other than its correct place; some perform it before the salaam (salutation at the end of the prayer) even in cases when' it has to be performed after the salaam; others prostrate after the salaam even when it should be performed before it. Therefore, it is very important to become aware of its rulings, especially for the Imaams whom the people follow in their prayers, and who have therefore taken on the responsibility of following that, which is correct and prescribed in their prayers, and of leading the Muslims upon that. So I wished to put before my brothers some of the rulings in this regard, hoping that Allaah, the Most High, will cause it to be of benefit to His believing servants.

So I say, whilst seeking the help of Allaah, the Most High, and asking Him to guide us to and grant us what is correct:

The Prostration of Forgetfulness is: two prostrations that the one praying makes in order to compensate for mistakes occurring in the prayer due to forgetfulness (sahw).

Its causes are three: having added something (az-Ziyaadah), having omitted something (an-Naqs) and having been in a state of doubt (as-Skakk).

(I) HAVING ADDED SOMETHING (Az-Ziyaadah)

If the person praying deliberately adds an extra standing, sitting, bowing or prostration, then his prayer is nullified. If however, he does so due to forgetfulness and does not remember the addition until having completed it, then there is nothing due upon him except Sujoodus-Sahw, his prayer will be correct. If however, he remembers whilst performing that addition, then it is obligatory upon him to leave that addition and also to perform Sujoodus-Sahw (i.e., at the end of the prayer), and his prayer will be correct.

An example of this is a person who prayer the Zuhr prayer as five rak'ahs, but does not remember that he has added except whilst in the Tashahhud. So he should complete the Tashahhud, and make the salutations (salaam) and then prostrate for forgetfulness, and then give the salutation (again). If, however, he does not remember the addition except after the salutation, then he should perform prostration for forgetfulness and give the salutation (again).

The proof for this is the hadeeth of 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood (radiallahu anhu) who said that, "The Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) prayed Zuhr with five rak'ahs, so someone said, 'Has increase been made in the prayer?' So he replied, 'And why is that?' They said, 'You have prayed five (rak'ahs).' So he performed two prostrations after having given the salutation" and in a narration (there occurs)
"... so he turned his feet and faced the Qiblah, and per formed two Prostrations, then he gave the Salutation." Reported by the whole group.'[1]

GIVING SALUTATIONS (Salaam) BEFORE COMPLETION OF THE PRAYER

Giving salutation before the completion of the Prayer is a case of addition in the Prayer. So whoever gives the salutation before the completion of the Prayer deliberately, then his prayer is nullified.

If, however, it is done due to forgetfulness, and he does not remember this until after a long time then he should repeat his prayer again. If he remembers a short time later, such as after two or three minutes, then he should complete his prayer and salutation, and then prostrate for forgetfulness, and then give salutation (again).

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[1] I.e., Al-Bukharee, Muslim and the four Sunan. Reported by al-Bukhaaree, (Eng. Trans. vol. 1, no. 394 & 398, vol. 2 no. 317, vol. 8 no.664, vol. 9, no. 355) Muslim, (Eng. trans. vol. 1 no. 1177) and Aboo Daawood, (Eng; Trans. vol. 1 nos. 1014-1017).

The proof for this is the hadeeth of Aboo Hurairah (radiallahu anhu) who said that, "The Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) lead them in the Zuhr prayer or the 'Asr prayer and gave the salutation after two rak'ah.s. Then he departed quickly from one of the doors of the mosque, and the people were saying that the prayer had been decreased. The Prophet sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam meanwhile, stood by a piece of wood placed in the mosque, leaning against it, as if he was angry. So a man stood and said, '0 Messenger of Allaah, have you forgotten or has the prayer been reduced?' So the Prophet, (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) said, 'I did not forget nor has it been reduced.' So the man said, 'Rather you have indeed forgotten.' So the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) said to the Companions, 'Is what he is saying true. They said, 'Yes.' So the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) went forward and prayed what remained of his prayer, then he gave the salutation, then he prostrated twice, then he gave the salutation." Agreed upon[1].

And if the Imaam gives the salutation before completion of his prayer and there are some followers who missed part of the prayer and who stand up to make up what they had missed, and then the Imaam remembers that there is something incomplete in his prayer that he has to make up for, so he stands to complete that - then in this case the followers who

[1] Reported by Al-Bukhaaree (Eng. Trans. vol. 2, nos. 318-321) and (Muslim Eng. Trans. vol. 1, nos. 1182-1186).

have already stood to complete what they missed have a choice between continuing to make up what they missed and then performing prostration for forgetfulness, and between returning to following the Imaam - and when he performs the salutation to complete what they had missed - and then to prostrate for forgetfulness after giving the salutation, and this is more right and is more prudent.

(II) OMISSION (Naqs)

Omission of Pillars (Arkaan) — If a person omits a Pillar (Rukn) from his prayer, then if it is in the initial Takbeer (Takbeeratul-Ihraam), then there is no prayer for him whether he left it deliberately or forgetfully because his prayer has not been established. If it is something other than the initial Takbeer, then if it is left deliberately, his prayer is nullified. If however, he leaves it due to forgetfulness, then if he goes on and reaches its place in the next rak'ah, then he discards the rak'ah which he forgot it in, and the following one takes its place. If he has not reached its place in the next rak'ah, then it is obligatory upon him to return to the missed pillar and to perform it and whatever comes after it. In either of these two cases it will be obligatory upon him to perform prostration for forgetfulness after the salutation.

An example (of this) is the case of a person who forgets the second prostration in the first rak'ah, but remembers this whilst sitting between the two prostrations in the second rak'ah. So he should discard the first rak'ah and the second one will take its

place, so he counts that as his first rak'ah and completes his prayer based upon that. Then he should give the salutation, prostrate for forgetfulness, and then give salutation.

A further example (is that of) a person who forgets the second prostration and the sitting before it in the first rak'ah. But he remembers this after standing straight from the rukoo in the second rak'ah. He should go back to sit and to prostrate, and then complete his prayer from there on. Then he should give the salutation, prostrate for forgetfulness, and finally give salutation.

Omission of Obligations (Waajibaat)- - If the person praying leaves an obligation from the obligations of the prayer deliberately, then his prayer is nullified. If however, he does so due to forgetfulness, and he remembers it before moving on from its place in the prayer, then he should perform it, and there is nothing upon him.

If he remembers it after having moved on from its place in the prayer, but before reaching the pillar that follows it, then he returns to it and performs it. Then he completes his prayer and gives salutation, prostrates for forgetfulness, and gives salutation. If however, he remembers it after reaching the pillar that follows it, then it is cancelled, so he should not go back to it but should continue his prayer and then prostrate for forgetfulness <u>before</u> giving the salutation.

An example of that (is where) a person raises himself up from the second prostration in the second rak'ah in order to stand for the third rak'ah, forgetting the first tashahhud. But he remembers before actually getting up, so he should remain in the sitting position, perform the tashahhud, and then complete his prayer and there is nothing upon him. However, if he remembers after beginning to stand, but before standing straight, then he should return to the sitting position and perform the tashahhud. He should then complete his prayer and give the salutation, prostrate for forgetfulness, and give the salutation.

If he remembers after standing straight, then the tashahhud is cancelled for him, he does not return to it. Rather he continues and completes his prayer, and prostrates for forgetfulness before giving the salutation.

The proof for this is what is reported by al-Bukhaaree and others from 'Abdullaah ibn Buhaynah (radiallahu anhu) who said that, "The Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) led them in Zulu prayer. He stood after the first two 'rak'ah and did not sit (meaning for the first tashahhud), so the people stood along with him. Then when it came to the completion of the prayer and the people awaited his salutation, he said takbeer whilst sitting and performed two prostrations before giving the salutation. Then he gave the salutation."[1]

[1] Reported by Bukhaaree, (Eng. Trans. vol. 2, nos. 315-316) and Muslim (Eng. Trans. vol.I, nos. 1163-1165).

(III) DOUBT (Shakk)

Doubt is to be uncertain about which of the two matters has occurred, and doubt is not taken notice of in matters of worship in three cases:

(i) If it is just a self-delusion, having no reality, like devilish whisperings.
(ii) If it occurs very frequently to a person such that he does not perform any act of worship except that he is caused to doubt in it.
(iii) If it occurs after the completion of the acts of worship, then it is not taken account of, as long as he is not certain of it, in which case he will act upon what he is certain of.

An example of this is that a person prays Zuhr, and after finishing his prayer he doubts whether he prayed three or four rak'ahs. Then he takes no notice of this doubt unless he is certain that he only prayed three rak'ah, in which case he should complete his prayer if it occurs a short while later, then he should give the salutation, prostrate for forgetfulness and then perform the salutation. If however, he does not remember until a long time has passed, then he must repeat the whole prayer afresh.

As for doubt in other than these three cases, then it is taken account of. Doubt in the prayer will be one of two kinds:

(i) That one of the two matters is more weighty in his mind, so he will act upon what is more weighty to him, then he will complete his prayer based upon that, after which he should give the salutation, prostrate for forgetfulness and finally give the salutation. An example of this is if a person prays.

Zuhr and doubts in a rak'ah (as to whether) it is the second or the third rak'ah? But the weightier case in his mind is that it is the third, so he makes it the third. So after he performs one further rak'ah, he gives the salutation, prostrates for forgetfulness and then he gives the salutation.

The proof for what is established in the two Saheehs and elsewhere from the hadeeth of 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood (radiallahu anhu) that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) said, "If one of you doubts in his prayer, then let him strive to arrive at what is correct, and complete it upon that basis. Then let him give the salutation and perform two prostrations."[1] This is the wording of al-Bukhaaree.

(ii) Neither of the two possibilities are more weightier in his mind. Therefore, he should act upon what he is certain of, which will be the lesser of the two, and complete his prayer based upon that, and then prostrate for forgetfulness before giving the salutation, and then give the salutation.

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[1] Reported by Bukhaaree (Eng. Trans. vol. 1 no. 394.)

An example of this is if a person is praying ‘Asr and doubts in a rak’ah (as to) whether it is the second or the third, and neither its being the second nor its being the third is more weighty in his mind. So he makes it the second, performs the first tashahhud and two rak’ahs after it, and then prostrates for forgetfulness and gives salutation.

The proof for this is what Muslim reports from Aboo Sa’eed al-Khudree (radiallahu anhu) that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) said, “If one of you doubts in his prayer and does not know how many he has prayed- whether it is three or four - then let him cast away the doubt and build upon what he is certain of. Then let him perform two prostrations before giving the salutation. So if he has prayed five, then they will make his prayer even for him, and if he has prayed the full four, then they will be a humiliation for Satan.”[1]

And from the examples of doubt is a person who arrives whilst the Imaam is in the bowing (rukoo’). So he gives the initial takbeer whilst he is standing up straight, and then he performs the rukoo’, and this will result in one of three cases:

(i) That he is certain that he has reached the Imaam whilst he was performing rukoo’, before he raises up from it. So he has caught that rak’ah and recitation of Sooratul-Faatihah is not required from him in this case.

[1] Reported by Muslim (Eng. Trans. vol. 1, no. 1166).

(ii) That he is certain that the Imaam raised up from the rukoo' before he reached him, then this rak'ah has escaped him.

(iii) That he doubts as to whether he caught up to the Imaam whilst he was performing rukoo' - such that he catches that rukoo', or whether the Imaam raised up from the rukoo' before he caught him - such that he will have missed that rak'ah. So if one of the two is more weighty in his mind, then he acts upon that and completes his prayer upon that basis and he gives the salutation, performs prostration for forgetfulness, and then gives the salutation. This is unless it is the case that he did not miss anything from the prayer because no prostration will be due upon him in that case.

But if neither of the two cases has more weight in his mind then he acts upon what is certain (which is that he has missed a rak'ah), so he completes his prayer upon that basis[1] and he prostrates for forgetfulness before giving the salutation, then he gives the salutation.

(Note): If he doubts in his prayer he should act upon what he is certain of, or upon what is more weighty in his mind - in accordance with the details mentioned previously. Then if it becomes clear to him that the course of action he has proceeded upon is indeed in accordance with reality and that he has neither added to or deleted anything from his prayer, then he no longer has to perform the prostration for forgetfulness,

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[1] I.e., he performs a further rak'ah in place of this one.

according to what is well known from the madhhab[1], due to the fact that the doubt which necessitates it is no longer present. A different saying is that it is still necessary in order to humiliate Satan, due to the saying of the Prophet sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam, "And if he has prayed it completely, then the two prostrations will be a humiliation for Satan." And due to the fact that he performed a part of his prayer in a state of doubt with regard to its performance, and this is the more correct saying.

An example of this (is if) a person prays and doubts in a rak'ah whether it is the second or the third rak'ah. Neither of these two possibilities carries more weight in his mind, so he makes it the second rak'ah and completes his prayer upon that basis. But whilst continuing (the prayer) it becomes clear to him that it was indeed the second rak'ah in reality. In such a case there is no prostration for forgetfulness due upon him in the saying most well known in the madhhab, but prostration for forgetfulness before the salutation is required from him in the second saying that we hold to be preferable.

Prostration for forgetfulness for one praying behind an Imaam

If the Imaam forgets then it is obligatory upon those following him in prayer to follow him in performance of the prostration for forgetfulness due to the saying of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) "The Imaam

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[1] I.e., the Hanbalee Madhhab

is appointed to be followed, so do not differ with him…" until he said "… so when he prostrates then prostrate"[1] This hadeeth is agreed upon from the hadeeth of Aboo Hurairah (radiallahu anhu).

So whether the Imaam prostrates for forgetfulness before the salutation or after it, it is obligatory upon those praying behind him. This is except for the one who arrived late and needs to make up the part of the prayer that he missed, he should not follow the Imaam in performance of prostration after the salutation, as this is not possible for him. This is because he cannot give the salutation along with the Imaam, so what he should do is to first make up what he had missed, and then give the salutation, then to prostrate for forgetfulness, and then to give the salutation.

An example of this (is if) a man enters the prayer along with the Imaam in the final rak'ah, and a prostration for forgetfulness is due from the Imaam after the salutation. So when the Imaam gives the salutation this man should stand to complete what he missed and does not prostrate along with the Imaam. Then when he has completed what he missed and has given the salutation, he should then perform prostration for forgetfulness after this salutation. But if the follower and not the Imaam forgets in the prayer, and nothing of the prayer escapes him, then no prostration is due from him. This is because his prostrating would cause

[1] Reported by Bukhaaree, (Eng. Trans. vol. 1, nos. 689, 701) and Muslim, Eng. Trans. (vol. 1 nos. 826 and 831).

him to differ from the Imaam and to disrupt his state of following him. Also because the Companions (radiallahu anhu) left the tashahhud when the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) forget it, so they stood along with him and did not sit for the tashahhud in order to comply with the duty of following and not differing with the Imaam.

But if he misses part of the prayer due to forgetting whilst praying behind the Imaam, or whilst making up what he had missed on his own, then he must prostrate for forgetfulness after completion of what he had missed. This prostration will be either before or after the salutation depending on its cause, as has preceded.

An example of this (is if) a follower forgets to say, 'Subhaana Rabbi yal-'Adlteem' in the rukoo', but he does not miss any action of the prayer, he does not need to prostrate. But if a rak'ah or more is missed by him, then he must make it up and then prostrate for forgetfulness before the salutation.

A further example (is if) a follower prays the Zuhr prayer along with the Imaam, then when the Imaam stands for the fourth rak'ah the follower remains sitting thinking it to be the last rak'ah. But when he knows that the Imaam has stood, he stands. So if he has not missed anything of the prayer then no prostration is due from him. But if it caused him to miss a rak'ah or more then he should make that up and give the salutation, and then prostrate for

forgetfulness, and give the salutation. This prostration is because of the sitting that he added to the prayer when the Imaam stood for the fourth rak ‘ah.

(Note): From what has preceded it will be clear that the prostration for forgetfulness is sometimes performed before the salutation, and sometimes after it.

So it is performed before salutation in two cases:
(i) If it is due to deficiency, due to the hadeeth of ‘Abdullaah ibn Buhaynah (radiallahu anhu) that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) prostrated for forgetfulness before the salutation when he left the first tashahhud, and the hadeeth with its wording has preceded.

(ii) If it is due to doubt when he is unable to distinguish which of the two possibilities carries more weight in his mind, due to the hadeeth of Aboo Sa’eed al-Khudree (radiallahu anhu) about one who doubts in his prayer and does not know how many he has prayed, whether it is three or four rak’ahs. So the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) commanded such a person to perform two prostrations before giving the salutation, and the hadeeth and its wording have preceded.

And the prostration for forgetfulness is performed after the salutations:
(i) If it is due to an addition in the prayer, due to the hadeeth of ‘Abdullaah ibn Mas’ood (radiallahu anhu) when the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam)

prayed Zulu with five rak'ahs, so they mentioned this to him after the salutation, so he (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) performed two prostrations and then gave the salutation. Nor did he (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) explain that his prostration after the salutation was due to the fact that he only knew of the addition aEter having performed it. So this shows that this ruling is general and that prostration because of addition is to be done after the salutation r whether he knows of the addition before the salutation or after it.

From this also is the case of one who forgetfully gives the salutation before completion of the prayer, then he remembers and completes it. He has added a salutation within the prayer, so he should prostrate after salutation due to the hadeeth of Aboo Hurairah (radiallahu anhu) that the Prophet gave the salutation in the Zuhr or the 'Asr prayer after two rak'ahs. They mentioned it to him, so he completed the prayer and then gave the salutation, then prostrated for forgetfulness, and the hadeeth with its wording has preceded.

(ii) If it is due to forgetfulness when one of the two possibilities carries more weight in his mind, due to the hadeeth of Ibn Mas'ood (radiallahu anhu) that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) commanded that the one who forgets in his prayer should strive to ascertain what is correct, and then to complete his prayer on that basis, then to give the salutation and to prostrate, and the hadeeth and its wording have preceded.

Then if two cases of forgetfulness occur for him, one of them requiring prostration before the salutation and the other requiring prostration after it, then the scholars say that prostration before the salutation predominates, so he should prostrate before it.

An example of this (is if) a person prays Zulu and stands up for the third rak'ah without sitting for the first tashahhud, then he sits in the third rak'ah thinking it to be the second. He then remembers that it is the third - so he should stand, pray a further rak'ah, and prostrate for forgetfulness and then give the salutation. So this person left the first tashuhhud, which requires prostration before the salutation, and added a sitting in the third rak'ah, which requires prostration after the salutation, so the prostration before the salutation predominates, and Allaah knows best.

So I ask Allaah that He should grant us and our Muslim brothers understanding of His Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger (sallallahu alaihe wa-sallam) and that we act upon them inwardly and outwardly, in matters of 'aqeedah, worship and dealings. And that He grants us all a good outcome, indeed He is the Most Beneficent, Most Generous.

And all praise is for Allaah, the Lord of all creation, and may Allaah extol and send blessings of peace

upon our Prophet Muhammad, upon his true followers and all his Companions.

Written and compiled by the one in need of Allaah, the Most High
Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaimeen
on 4/3/1400H